Jewry Reflected, Refracted, and Recorded on Medals

curated by

Ira Rezak

exhibition presented by

Center for Jewish History

cover:
Synagogues: Medzhybyzh (2000)

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Calendar medals: Keren Hayesod (Austria, 1937)

Jewish Medals: An Introduction

The record of Jewish history is conventionally transmitted and experienced textually, preserved in documentary archives and in books. Museums do however reference history in other graphic media, such as prints and paintings, to pictorially represent the past, in addition to displaying objects, religious and domestic, which served various uses in the past. The present exhibition focuses on a category of artifacts that combine all of the above-mentioned characteristics — text, imagery and functional participation – and which have come down to us in considerable numbers as material, indeed palpable, records of Jewish history.

Numismatic specimens, coins, tokens, medals, badges, and related items are generally smaller and often less imposing than many traditional objects of art housed in museums. Moreover, because they were typically produced identically, and as multiples, often by the hundreds or even the thousands, such manufactured products might be thought less significant than rarer hand-crafted objects. Coins and medals are in many ways comparable to books and prints, replicated and then published to achieve a wide distribution in society. In fact, most numismatic items are similar to both texts and paper graphics with respect to their means of production. They are typically imprinted, physically pressed onto a medium, but of course usually onto metal rather than paper. Like other publications, coins and medals have, independently of their other specific functions, long been recognized as vehicles well-suited for conveying messages. Coins in fact are the oldest format for imprinted publication and they therefore have long served to disseminate official information and propaganda. Monetary coinage has always been and still remains the exclusive prerogative of sovereign governments. As a result, not only coins but their imitative successors — medals, tokens, badges, seal impressions, and amulets — all tend to retain to the present day an aura of authority. That such forms are made of metal rather than paper has made them more durable than materials printed on paper, thus remaining available to historians. Besides the information already recorded directly on numismatic specimens, they may often be further contextualized when provenance about their source, usage, or survival is available.

Coins

Judea: Three bronze leptons [small change] (100 B.C.E. – 130 C.E.)

Coins, as everyone knows, are an official and reliable means of exchange and, when made of precious metals, they were also historically a store of value. **Tokens** are circulating coin-like objects but having been issued by local rather than sovereign authorities — towns, communities, institutions, or even private merchants — their circulation is valid only locally. **Medals** to some extent resemble coins, but they have less need to be small and easily carried, and they are also freer to present a wider range of subject matter, both textually and iconographically. Having since the Renaissance been available to a variety of sponsors, including categories lacking sovereignty, such as communal, commercial, and private institutions, and indeed even private individuals, medals have been able to perform societal functions far beyond the capacity of coinage. In popular usage medals are most commonly envisioned as wearable **insignia**, rewarding personal achievement — military, academic, communal, scholastic, athletic, etc. But medals never intended to be worn, but rather passed from hand to hand, also serve wider functions as symbolic markers; one might think of them as portable mini-monuments, celebrating rulers, reflecting polities and wars, commemorating contemporary events, and also historical anniversaries. Less formally, they may function as individual proofs of presence and participation in activities of all sorts — of official events or merely as souvenirs of private experiences. Medallic portraiture has served as honorific testimonials during the lives of sitters, as historical memorialization after death, and even as privately commissioned likenesses, analogous to the contemporaneous painted portraits of the wealthy. In religious contexts, amulets and talismans in the form of medals abound, biblical scenes perform inspirational and educational functions, dedications of buildings

and institutions are recorded, as are births, deaths, and marriages. **Badges**, worn externally and meant to indicate and project affiliation or status, may be emblems of authority, signs of membership, or simply act as passes allowing wearers to enter otherwise restricted spaces.

It is worth emphasizing that medals as such were not regularly employed before the mid-15th century so that, apart from amulets, none of the above-mentioned medallic categories existed before the Renaissance. Three techniques have been commonly associated with medal making:

1. **Casting:** Pouring molten metal into preformed molds

2. **Striking:** Forcefully impressing designs upon metal blank

3. **Engraving or chasing:** Using tools to individually form and/or inscribe single specimens

Both casting and striking methods are capable of producing multiples of a single model. Of these techniques, the most common by far has been the mechanical striking of coins and medals. All of these methods may be supplemented by the careful inscription by incision of additional information in order to personalize a pre-formed medal.

How then do Jews, individually, and within their communities and institutions, as well as their history, fit within the above-outlined picture? First, it's important to note that, except for a very brief period in antiquity some two thousand years ago, and since then only after the foundation of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948, there were no Jewish national governments and consequently no official Jewish coinages, strictly speaking. Coinage is therefore far less valuable as a record of Judaism per se than it is for Christianity. On the other hand, almost all the other categories mentioned above — tokens, medals, badges and amulets — were utilized by Jewish communities, institutions, and individuals at various times in both medieval and modern times. Furthermore, Judaism as the forerunner, indeed the undeniable basis for the formation of Christianity, has resulted in substantial Jewish influence on medals and amulets and indeed even upon the coins produced by Christians and by secular authorities through the ages. Such influence was mainly imitative and thus positive, but at times it alternatively manifested contemporary antisemitism.

The curatorial question, for the collector as well as for the museologist, is how to distinguish, characterize, and organize Jewish medals and their kindred forms. Earlier definitions and categorizations tended to be strict, requiring selected items to have been made by Jews or to feature explicitly Jewish content. Even when adopting such seemingly precise criteria, however, there remain challenging questions of how actually to define the terms Jew and Jewish and thus how ultimately to limit what fits and what to select within these categories. Such questions have been much debated subjects about which reasonable persons will differ; the present introductory essay is not the place to resolve such questions. Suffice it here to say that the modern museological tendency, and the choices made by this observer for this exhibition, favor a generous approach, inclusive of items that may not meet the strictest of definitions, but which offer evidence for contextualizing and thus understanding Jewish history in the broadest sense. As an example, with respect to text, the presence of Hebrew might have seemed to prove Jewish origin irrespective of the author, while with respect to imagery the mere presence of Jesus might be seen automatically to disqualify a specimen. However, Hebrew in Christian context surely shows significant Jewish influence, if not immediate presence, and the use of Hebrew texts in connection with Christian images once again provides evidence of the historical linkage between the two biblical religions.

The observer of the materials contained in the present exhibition can therefore find a remarkably wide range of numismatic evidence for Jewish history both among Jews and of their interactive presence within surrounding societies. These artifacts reflect, refract, and record Jewish experience, but in addition they were often also active participants in that history, agents that facilitated actual functions of Jewish communal life and have survived to provide some tangible connection for us to Jewry's past. Jews are known as *Shearit Hapletah*, a small group, survivors of much adversity, but they are also the progenitors of the Abrahamic religions which have flourished throughout Europe and Western Asia. The coins and medals that emerged and survived in these places still retain the impression made by Jews upon society throughout their history.

Ira Rezak
2024

Actors & Agents in Jewish History

The selection is deliberately diverse in order to emphasize the extensive range of materials, styles, and subject matter that can be found preserved in numismatic form. The visual impact of the various items displayed differs considerably and may be of artistic interest, but attention should also be paid to the wide range of functions implied by their creation and usage.

Each item presented was employed for some personal or social purpose; they have each been imbued with meaning in a moment of Jewish history, having been received, purchased, and handled by Jews. Some were valued highly, others treated in a more utilitarian fashion. All have now passed from active service and have become artifacts that may be examined in one's hand or, as at present, under glass. Each piece still incorporates its past meanings and reflects the times and circumstances of earlier participation in Jewish lives and history. The descriptions found below are necessarily brief, but with some reflection about their past, they may provide the viewer with some sense of the Jewish history of which they were and remain a part.

Opposite page (detail):
Personalized engraving on a previously cast medal: Doctor David Cohen's medallic pass to enter the Medical Botanical gardens in Amsterdam (1769)

Coins

Judea: Silver shekel, year two (67 C.E.) with Hebrew inscriptions using Samaritan letter forms

Coins

Judea: Three bronze leptons [small change] (100 B.C.E. – 130 C.E.)

Coins

Three Hungarian coins with Hebrew letters: *Alef*, *Peh*, *Het*, 13th century. These letters represented the Jewish mintmasters responsible for the coins' production.

Coins

Three trilingual coins of Palestine during the British Mandate (1935 – 1942)

Coins

Three coins from the Lodz (Litsmannstadt) Ghetto (1943)

Coins

Four coins of the State of Israel (1949 – 1981)

Coins

Shekel imitation (Germany, 17th Century); fantasy coin of Kings David and Solomon (Germany, 16th century); coin with a tetragrammaton (Denmark, 1645)

Tokens

Community Tokens: Sopron, Hungary, c. 1925; Mikveh Israel, Palestine, c. 1885

Tokens

Charity Tokens: Aleppo, c. 1900; Chicago, c. 1925

Tokens

Shechitah Tokens: Wuerzburg, Germany, c. 1900; Posen, Germany, c. 1900

Tokens

Merchant tokens: Felix's Kosher Dining Saloon (New York, 1863); tailor (St Paul, c. 1930); clothing (Chicago, 1939)

Tokens

Food distribution tokens for the poor: Palestine, c. 1900; Poryzk, Poland, c. 1900

Tokens

Entry passes for Chevrah Kadisha members: Netherlands, c. 1800

Medals

Medals honoring individuals: Marcel Marceau, France, 1982

Medals

Medals commemorating historical events:
250th Anniversary of the Jews in America, 1904

Medals

Dedication medals: Beth Israel Hospital, Newark, N.J., 1928

Medals

Biblical-themed medals: Jerusalem Prize/Samson (Israel)

Medals

Award medal personalized: Rabbi & Mrs. David de Sola Pool; Herman Wouk

Medals

Medals as souvenirs: Paneriai extermination site (Lithuania, 1984); Jerusalem (Israel, 1965)

Medals

Commercial commemoration: Rich Brothers (Atlanta, 1942)

Medals

Rabbinic medals: David Oppenheim (1942)

Medals

Art for art's sake: Bereshit [Genesis] (New York, 1973)

Medals

Cultural events: Levant Fair (Tel Aviv, 1932); Jewish Festival (Krakow, 1992)

Medals

Medals of Jewish politicians: Adolphe Cremieux (France, 1880)

Medals

Military-themed medals: Admiral Hyman Rickover (U.S., 1958)

Wearable Insignia

School prizes: Central Synagogue (New York, 1889);
Temple Bethel (New York, 1907)

Wearable Insignia

School insignia: Jewish Burschenschaft [Dueling Society] (Bavaria, 1931);
graduation medal (Estonia, 1924)

Wearable Insignia

Fraternal organizations: Achei Brith/Shield of Abraham (England, 1920);
B'nai B'rith badges: Memphis, Tennessee, 1925

Wearable Insignia

Masonic badges: Bezalel Lodge (Tel Aviv, 1949);
R.L.E Nathan Lodge (Milan, c. 1960)

Wearable Insignia

Sports medals: Makkabi (Czechoslovakia, 1936); horse race (Israel, 1936)

Wearable Insignia

Military insignia: Judean Regiment Cap Badge/WWI (England, 1917);
Iron Cross/WWI (Germany, 1914)

Wearable Insignia

War victims: Jewish War Relief contribution/WWI (U.S., 1918); displaced person's camp police badge (Germany, 1946)

Wearable Insignia

Immigration support: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (Germany, 1947); Landsmannschaften (local immigrant societies) lapel pins: Voznesensker, 1923; Fastover, 1911

Wearable Insignia

Holocaust site souvenirs: Maidanek, 1979; Lodz (Litzmannstadt), 1970

Wearable Insignia

Labor organizations: Poalei Zion (Poland, c. 1925); Poalei Zion (England, c. 1925)

Wearable Insignia

Communist celluloid badges: Morgen Freiheit Newspaper (U.S., c. 1935); Bund (U.S., c. 1930)

Wearable Insignia

Zionist insignia: 13th Zionist Congress (Carlsbad, 1923);
2nd Zionist Congress (Basel, 1898)

Wearable Insignia

Support for Palestine: Pioneer women (U.S., 1936); Keren Kayemet (U.S., c. 1960)

Wearable Insignia

Palestine settlement: Hebrew University dedication (Jerusalem, 1925);
Rishon LeTsion, 10th anniversary (1892)

Wearable Insignia

Palestine organizations: Keren Kayemet (Palestine, c. 1910);
Hadassah badge (U.S., c. 1950)

Wearable Insignia

Poor relief: Juedische Hilfe (Germany, c. 1925);
Tomchei Aniyim (Warsaw, c. 1925); Old age homes: Linas HaTsedek (Lodz, 1915)

Wearable Insignia

Amulets: Moses/Shema (Russia, c. 1910); Shaddai (France c. 1910)

Wearable Insignia

Medical organizations: South Africa Prize (1950); Hebrew Sick Benefit Organization (Bridgeport, c. 1920)

Wearable Insignia

Hevrah Kadisha badges: Sofia, Bulgaria (c. 1935); Helsinki, Finland (1955)

Medallic Manufacturing Techniques

Cast bronze medallion of Louis Brandeis commemorating his naming as a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1916

Medallic Manufacturing Techniques

Medal hand-engraved and chased: Gordonia [preparation for Aliyah] (Poland, c. 1930); Cast medal: Gracia Nasi (1995) A later re-casting of an Italian medal originally cast in 1558

Medallic Manufacturing Techniques

Personalized engraving on a previously cast medal: Doctor David Cohen's medallic pass to enter the Medical Botanical gardens in Amsterdam (1769)

Medallic Manufacturing Techniques

Medals made of ceramic and of foil-wrapped chocolate

Medallic Manufacturing Techniques

The original die for striking the bronze medal of Rabbi Sabato Morais (Philadelphia, 1923)

Medallic Manufacturing Techniques

A medal of Narcisse Leven hand-carved from Dead Sea basalt (Palestine, 1915)

Medals for the Masses

Religious ritual objects preserved in museums are typically elaborate, handmade, and often one of a kind, likely to have been ensconced in places of public worship. Even privately owned pieces are apt to be finely wrought and costly, the former possessions of wealthy individuals. Medals and insignia, by contrast, often were made and survive in multiple copies and were originally distributed widely, not only to the rich and privileged.

This pattern of manufacture, distribution, and usage assures that surviving coins, medals, and insignia are likelier than more formal ritual objects to reflect the life of the community at large. The artifacts in this section therefore touch directly on and reflect many aspects of the lives and experiences of ordinary Jews. Some are pictorial, depicting celebrations and services, while others have been more active, serving as charitable tokens, protective amulets, or outward signs of participation in communal activity throughout the religious year and the Jewish life cycle. All, however, reflect and illuminate the beliefs, customs, and institutions of Judaism as a religious faith and as a culture.

Opposite page (detail):
Tisha B'Av at the Western Wall [Schatz] (Palestine, 1915)

Biblical Images

Christian images: Abraham & Sarah (Germany, c. 1550);
Haman & Mordechai (Germany, c. 1650)

Biblical Images

Jewish images: Miriam (France, 1980)

Biblical Images

Jewish images: the golden calf [Vincze] (England, c. 1950)

Biblical Images

Jewish images: Jeremiah [Schatz] (Palestine, 1911)

Annual Religious Cycle

Calendar medals: Keren Hayesod (Austria, 1937)

Annual Religious Cycle

Shabbat: Blessing the candles [Schatz] (Bulgaria, 1903);
parental Sabbath blessing (Germany, c. 1820)

Annual Religious Cycle

Days of Awe: Priestly Blessing (England, c. 1960);
Shofar [Schatz] (Palestine, 1914); Tashlich prayer [Kohn] (Germany, 1817)

Annual Religious Cycle

Tashlich prayer [Kohn] (Germany, 1817)

Annual Religious Cycle

Sukkah [Farbmann] (Vienna, 1922)

Annual Religious Cycle

Purim Shalach Manot [Raban] (Palestine, c. 1925)

Annual Religious Cycle

Simchat Torah [Farbmann] (Vienna, 1922)

Annual Religious Cycle

Seder in B'nai Brak [copied from Haggadah illustration] (19th Century)

Annual Religious Cycle

Tisha B'Av at the Western Wall [Schatz] (Palestine, 1915)

Life Cycle

Birth: Van Wien birth (Munich, 1912)

Annual Religious Cycle

Chanukkah: Yemenite Chanukkah lamp coin (Israel, 1982)

Life Cycle

Circumcision: Medal of the mohel Levi Solomon de Beer (Utrecht, 1866); engraved gift medal (Hamburg, 1871)

Life Cycle

Bar Mitzvah: Confirmation, an engraved coin (Prague, 1900)

Life Cycle

Wedding anniversaries: Luria 60th (Pinsk, 1900)

Life Cycle

Marriage: Marriage in wartime (Germany, 1917)

Life Cycle

Death: Official war death commemorative (England, 1918)

Life Cycle

Graves: Engraved Yahrzeit reminder (Russia, 1907)

Synagogues & Schools

Synagogues: Cologne (1866)

Synagogues & Schools

Synagogues: Frankfurt (1907)

Synagogues & Schools

Synagogues: Medzhybyzh (2000); Temple Emanuel (New York, 1929)

Synagogues & Schools

Schools: Hebrew Benevolent Orphan Asylum Society (New York, 1900)

Synagogues & Schools

School prizes: Mexico City Yiddish School (Mexico City, 1959); Temple Rodeph Sholom (New York, 1902); Free School & Talmud Torah (Calcutta, 1936)

Synagogues & Schools

Schools: Philanthropin [Horovitz] (Frankfurt, 1904)

Rabbis

Akiva Eiger (Germany, 1937); Chatam Sofer (Slovakia, 1995)

Rabbis

Adolf Jellinek (Austria, 1893); David de Sola Pool (Israel, 1970)

Tsedakah

Charity: OMSZA (Budapest, 1940); Aufbringungswerk (Berlin, 1936)

Rabbis

Leo Baeck (U.S., c1970); Solomon Schechter [Schatz] (Palestine, c. 1915);
Bal Shem Tov (Medzhybyzh, 2000)

Tsedakah

Orphanages: Rotterdam (1933)

Tsedakah

Charity: "A Jewish mother" teaches her child to donate charity [Schatz] (Bulgaria, 1904)

Tsedakah

Charity insignia: Hospital (Buenos Aires, 1928); Hevrah Bikur Cholim (Bucharest, c. 1930); Care/Hesed Avot (Ukraine, c. 1990)

Tsedakah

Charity insignia: OSE [Jewish Health Society] (Hungary, c. 1930); Bikur Cholim token (Beirut, 1904); Free Loan Society (Hamburg, 1841)

Tsedakah

Charity insignia: Bais Lechem (Warsaw, c. 1925);
Keren Kayemet (Palestine, c. 1910)

Amuletic Protection

Amulets: Automobile amulet (Gemany, c. 1930);
childbirth hand-engraved amulet (Iraq, c. 1920)

Tsedakah

Philanthropic Organizations: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies (U.S., c. 1950)

Amuletic Protection

Amulets: Childbirth amulet against Lilith (Morocco, c. 1900)

Amuletic Protection

Amulets: Meah Shearim (Jerusalem, c. 1960);
Heh amulet on a gold 2 ½ dollar coin (U.S., 1851);
Rabbi Kadoori's amulet (Israel, c. 1980)

Amuletic Protection

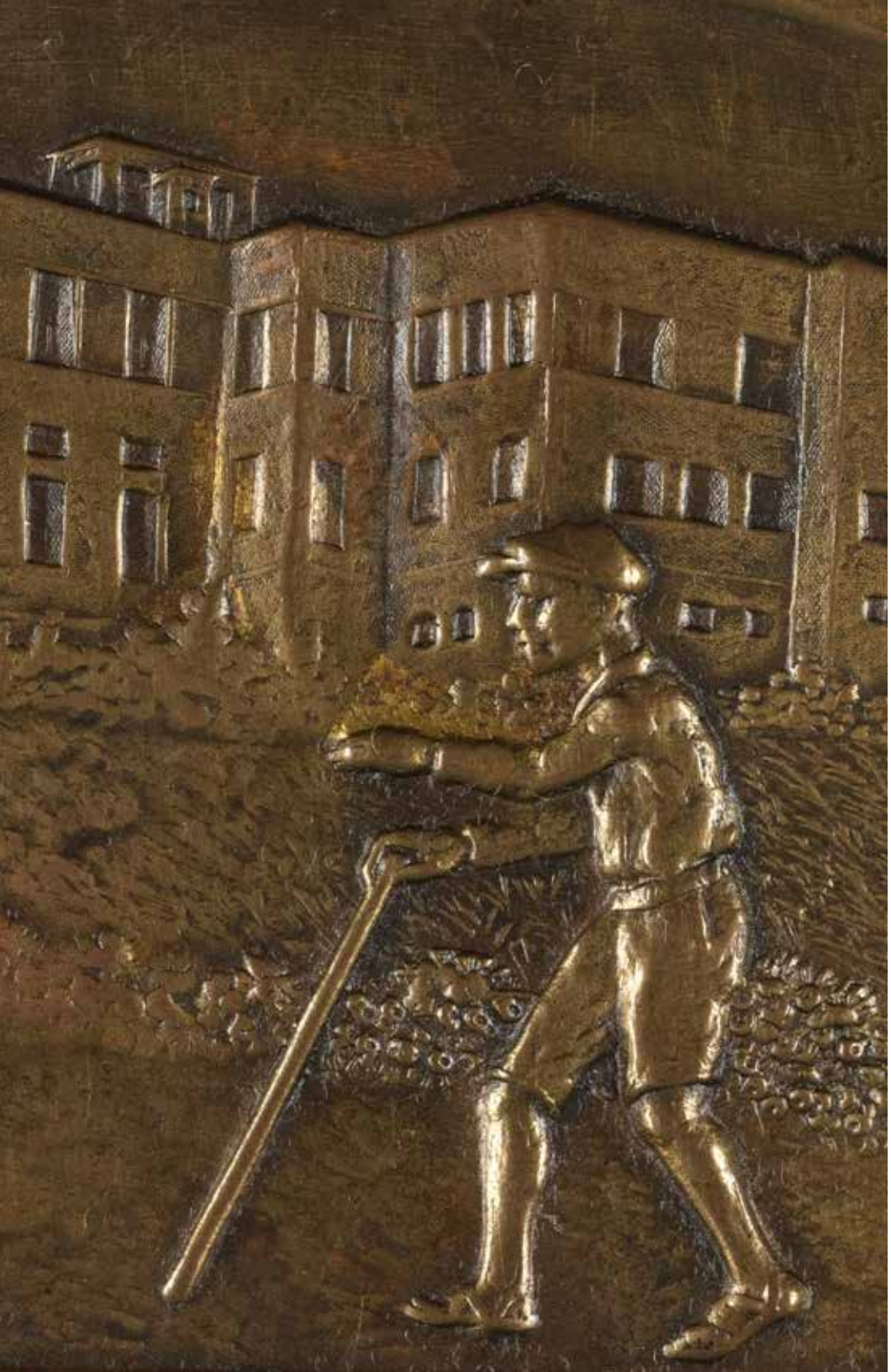
Amulets: Priestly Blessing (U.S,. c. 1950)

Amuletic Protection

Amulets: This too shall pass (U.S., c. 1950); Shaddai (Israel, c. 1955)

Amuletic Protection

Birth amulets: Jerusalem (c. 1910); Poland (c. 1900)



Secular Symbols

Though traditionally defined by their religious practices, Jews are also active by necessity in the secular world. Famously "set apart" both by religious strictures and external constraints, Jews have had to develop distinct communal organizations and institutions to deal with social, economic, and political concerns. Such constructs are imbued with Jewish values, but those dealing with educational, medical, fraternal, and political matters have parallels to similar associations established in surrounding non-Jewish societies. Other experiences are peculiar to Jewish history, however, and have required more specific forms of reaction to non-Jewish environments. Antisemitism, emancipation, and particularly the Holocaust are examples of these uniquely Jewish experiences. In addition, the Zionist movement and subsequent birth of the State of Israel have continued to redefine global Jewish consciousness.

Medals, a Renaissance invention, have been available throughout the modern period to document Jewish-Gentile relations, leaving contemporary records of specific moments of such interactions. Meanwhile, progressive emergence from the ghetto, literally and figuratively, resulted in considerable acculturation of Jews as individuals within the wider non-Jewish world, with many achieving secular fame in a wide variety of fields, and at times assimilating non-Jewish values. Medals and insignia have materially tracked all these tendencies and vividly reflect such dynamic developments.

Opposite page (detail):
Jewish Institute for the Blind (Jerusalem, c. 1925)

Communal Organizations

Order Brith Abraham Convention (U.S., 1929)

Communal Organizations

Senior Council of Baden Jewry (Germany, 1930)

Communal Organizations

La Bienfaisante Israelite (France, 1893)

Communal Organizations

High Commission for Jewish Affairs (Netherlands, 1827)

Medical Institutions

Mt. Sinai Medical Center (New York, c. 1920)

Communal Organizations

Order Achei Brith and Shield of Abraham (England, 1925);
Masonic Menorah Lodge (England, c. 1910);
Amicale du Marais 3rd & 4th Arrondissements (France, c. 1950)

Medical Institutions

Israel Defense Forces, Medical Corps emblem (c. 1955)

Medical Institutions

Jewish Institute for the Blind (Jerusalem, c. 1925);
Red Magen Adom for Palestine (U.S., c. 1935)

Medical Institutions

Jewish Institute for Geriatric Care (New Hyde Park, 1971);
Joodse Invalide [Old Age Home] (Amsterdam, c. 1935)

Medical Institutions

Auxiliary Hospital at Lycee Janson de Sailly (Paris, 1919)

Secular Notables

Isaac Bashevis Singer (France, 1979); Martin Buber-Franz Rosenzweig
Award for Jewish-Christian Cooperation (Germany, 1968)

Secular Notables

Volodymyr Zelensky (U.S., 2023)

Secular Notables

Leonard Bernstein (U.S., 1995); Leon Trotsky (Portugal, 1979)

Secular Notables

Moses Mendelssohn (Germany, 1774); Heinrich Heine (Austria, 1906)

Secular Notables

Franz Kafka (Czech Republic, c. 2000); Robert Oppenheimer (France, 1968)

Relationship With Outside Communities

Religious emancipation in Westphalia (Germany, 1808);
first Jewish lawyer in Germany (Hamburg, 1836)

Relationship With Outside Communities

Archbishop of Olmuetz, Moravia, born Theodore Kohn, (Austria, 1892)

Relationship With Outside Communities

Religious emancipation in Austrian lands (Austria, 1781);
300th Anniversary of Jewish Resettlement in England (1956)

Relationship With Outside Communities

Religious conciliation; the Pope's visit to Rome's Synagogue (1986)

Antisemitism

Korn Jew as grain speculator causing famine (Germany, 1694);
Korn Jew hanged at the end of the famine (Germany, 1695);
execution of Jud Suess (Stuttgart, 1738)

Antisemitism

Mendel Beilis's trial for a blood libel accusation (Kiev, 1913);
Russian pogrom relief medal (Netherlands, 1920)

Antisemitism

Jew mocked as a grain speculator (Poland, 1918);
Hitler quoted as warring against the Jews (Germany, c. 1940)

Antisemitism

Jews exiled during World War I [Arnold Zadikow] (Germany, c. 1920)

Holocaust

Nazi badge accusing Jews of cruel dictatorship (Germany, c. 1937);
Val D'Hiv roundup of Jews in Paris (France, c. 1992)

Holocaust

Monument to the massacre in Rimanowe (Poland, 1992)

Holocaust

German extermination sites (Poland, 1999)

Holocaust

Yad VaShem awards to righteous gentiles (Israel, 1965)

Zionism

Max Nordau [Schatz] (Palestine, c. 1925); Theodor Herzl (Canada, 1997)

Zionism

BILU Pioneers 50th anniversary (Palestine, 1932);
Zionist Congress badges: 13th (Carlsbad, 1923); 21st (Geneva, 1939)

Zionism

United Palestine Appeal (U.S., c. 1930); Zion gate amulet (Jerusalem, c. 1925)

Zionism

Convention (U.S., 1920); Congress (Poland, 1918);
Zionist badge: London (c. 1920)

Palestine

Oriental Jew in Jerusalem [Murro] (Palestine, c. 1930)

Palestine

Palestine tokens: Zichron Yaakov c. 1885; Jaffa Hotel (Jerusalem, c. 1885);
amulet from Yeshivat Rav Meir Baal HaNess (Tiberias, c. 1900)

Palestine

Rachel's Tomb souvenir carved from Dead Sea basalt (Palestine, c. 1910)

Palestine

Pioneer from America [Murro] (Palestine, c. 1930);
Joseph Trumpeldor [Schatz] (Palestine, 1922)

Palestine

Plowing the land [?Raban] (Palestine, c. 1925)

Israel

Dead Sea Scrolls (Israel, 1961); 1700 Balfour Declaration (U.S., c. 1975)

Palestine

Eliezer Ben Yehudah on his deathbed [Murro] (Palestine, 1922)

Israel

Israel Liberata (Israel, 1962)

Israel

Israel Revived (Netherlands, 1968)

Israel

David Ben Gurion [Kretchmer] (Israel, c. 1950);
Searching for the Messiah [Castel] (Israel, c. 1990)

Israel

Israel redeemed (England, c. 1965); Massada shall not fall again (Israel, 1964)

Israel

Peace and hope for the Middle East (Israel, c. 1980)

A Word About Technique

Medals large or small, like coins, are usually struck from and impressed by dies, metal blocks in which the desired text and image has been carved intaglio (in reverse) so that the final medal, after striking, comes out positively. In the present exhibition, a die prepared for the manufacture of the obverse (principal side) of a 1923 medal honoring Rabbi Sabato Morais, minister of Congregation Mikve Israel in Philadelphia on the 100th anniversary of his birth, may be seen in the first section, *Actors & Agents in Jewish History*. The bronze medal of Rabbi Morais seen next to it was produced from this steel die.

However, some medals, especially those of a larger size, are formed by casting, that is, by pouring molten metal into a mold formed from a positive model that an artist had created in clay, plaster, or another malleable substance. The large medal of Louis Brandeis is such a casting. The medal of Gracia Nasi shown nearby was cast in recent years to copy an original medal that was itself formed by casting more than three hundred years earlier. This latter piece displays a surface that is less shiny and smooth than either the struck medal of Morais or the original finely cast Brandeis medallion; this rougher surface resulted from small air bubbles introduced during the pouring of the molten bronze into the mold.

A third technique uses the direct incision or engraving of images and texts onto a metal surface. Entire medals may be formed in this way, for example the medallic badge made in Poland circa 1925 for a member of Gordonia, an anti-Marxist group that prepared youth for immigration to Palestine. Alternatively, a medal already struck by dies, or cast, may subsequently have been personalized by adding the name of a recipient. An example is the Dutch medal engraved with the name David Cohen which originally was cast with a Latin inscription and which served as Dr. Cohen's entry pass into the medical botanical garden in Amsterdam in 1769.

The exhibition includes coins, medals, tokens, and badges that have been formed from the wide variety of materials typically used for such purposes: bronze (a copper alloy), silver, gold, or other softer metals such as aluminum, lead, tin, zinc, and pewter mixtures. Beyond metals, however, many other materials have been employed for medal-making, including glass, plastics, ceramics, celluloid, colorful enamels, and for Chanukah-gelt, foil-wrapped chocolate. Basalt, an igneous volcanic rock for the area of the Dead Sea was also commonly employed as the basis for medals, often as souvenirs of the Holy Land. A specimen based on this type of stone depicts Narcisse Leven, founder of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, and was finely carved by a young woman training at the Bezalel School in Jerusalem in 1915.

The items in this exhibition vary widely in shape and size. Coins are at times less than a centimeter in diameter. Medals, which were generally meant to fit into the hand, normally range up to four inches in diameter, but may also be less than an inch, as in the case of a small medal commemorating George Fandell Philips, the Jewish Lord Mayor of London in 1886, or as large as the medallion by Alexander Portnoff of Louis Brandeis that celebrates his ascension to the United States Supreme court in 1916, which measures nearly 11 inches.

Steel die:
This die was used to create the bronze medal of Rabbi Morais.

Bronze medal:
Medal of Rabbi Morais cast using the die seen above.

Afterword

The primary purpose in selecting the material for this exhibition was to convey a sense of the wide range of Jewish subject matter and functionality accessible via the somewhat unfamiliar medium of numismatics, the field of coins, tokens, medals, and insignia. Obviously, there are other ways of looking at the same material objects. One of these is through the prism called "art," which is usually understood as a shorthand for aesthetic appreciation. In fact, the word art more generally means skill, as in the arts of medicine and diplomacy. Nevertheless, medal-making, a sculptural mode that confines itself to bas-relief, may also be properly considered an art form in the usual sense. Clearly, some of the specimens on view have little claim to artistry in the conventional sense, but others were formed by individuals who were sculpturally trained and who considered themselves artists. The brief descriptive entries in the catalog at hand therefore has where appropriate identified between brackets the names of several Jewish sculptors as, for example, [Schatz]. The following is a list of the Jewish artists cited.

Boris Schatz (1866–1932) was born in Lithuania, studied in Paris, worked as sculptor for the king of Bulgaria, and migrated to Palestine in 1906 where he founded the famous Bezalel School in Jerusalem. His sentimental medallic portraiture was inspired by his personal experience in the shtetl culture of Eastern Europe.

Moses Murro (1883–1957) was born in Minsk, trained in St. Petersburg, and arrived in Palestine in 1920 where he worked at the Bezalel School and also privately. He carved ivory and stone models and specialized in genre representations of Jewish individuals of the diaspora who had come to settle in the Holy Land.

Shmuel Kretschmer (1894–1972) was born in Kovno and came to Palestine in 1912. He too worked at the Bezalel School, but ultimately established a private medal manufacturing enterprise that flourished for decades during the British Mandate period and continuing after the establishment of the State of Israel. His workshop produced insignia as well as medals with strong Zionistic emphases.

Max Farbmann (1886–1950) was born in Lithuania, and trained and worked in Vienna for many years before arriving in Palestine in 1933, where he worked privately but was also a teacher of art. Primarily a portraitist, he was a woodcarver and recorded familiar synagogue scenes based on his experience in his homeland.

Arnold Zadikow (1884–1943) was born in Germany, training there and in France. A soldier in World War I, he was interned as a prisoner of war in England. He fled Nazi Germany in 1933 but was ultimately imprisoned in Theresienstadt where he died. A modernist sculptor, he also modeled portraits of Jews.

Leo Horovitz (1876–1964) was born and worked in Frankfurt am Main; he also trained in Munich and Paris but left Germany for England in 1939. Primarily a silversmith, he also produced medals, especially portraits of German Jews including his father, a rabbi born in Hungary but long based in Frankfurt.

Paul Vincze (1907–1994) was born in Hungary and trained in Budapest, but moved to London in 1938 where he produced a great many medals, the majority of Jewish interest often specifically referencing Israeli events.

Kohn (active in the first half of the 19th century). Though his name and location within Germany are unknown, this medalist created medals dated 1817 and 1830 that were functional Jewish items including prayers for travelers, for Brit Milah, and for Tashlich.

Credits

About the Curator

Ira Rezak is a retired physician and educator who has studied and collected Judaica for many years. An Emeritus Professor at Stony Brook University, he serves as president of the Harry G. Friedman Society.

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